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Greetings from your National Weather Service office in Tallahassee, Florida!

This is another installment of our Skywarn Spotter Newsletter. We are trying to send these letters in more regular intervals to keep you, our valued spotters, informed about the spotter program and any other important news we would like to bring to your attention.

This month, we'll focus on submitting the effective spotter report. Even though the summer is almost gone, we still have another month and a half of afternoon thunderstorms. As I am sure you are all aware, these afternoon thunderstorms can quickly become strong to severe and be very prolific lightning producers. Moreover, if you are in an urbanized area that is prone to flooding, like downtown Tallahassee, a slow moving afternoon thunderstorm could easily make driving treacherous.

Each of these thunderstorms that become strong to severe poses a threat to life or property if precautions are not taken. Here at the NWS in Tallahassee, we issue a variety of statements and warnings to let the public know about these storms. First off, let's review the definition for a severe thunderstorm. A severe thunderstorm contains winds in excess of 58 mph (50 knots) and/or hail of penny size (3/4") or larger. For storms that do not meet this criteria, but are nevertheless capable of knocking a few limbs out of trees, knocking over weaker trees, producing pea size hail, or significant lightning, we issue a Significant Weather Alert. The Significant Weather Alert started a couple of years ago as a way of highlighting strong thunderstorms that haven't reached severe criteria. Notice that severe thunderstorm criteria do not include mention of any quantity of lightning or amount of rainfall.

When these storms develop, we rely on reports from our spotters to deliver "ground truth" or reports of any damage from the storm on the ground. During times of strong to severe thunderstorms, our forecasters are very busy monitoring the radar and issuing significant weather alerts and warnings as needed. Determining what needs to be reported to the National Weather Service is very important. A list of what should be reported appears below.

Report any...

1. Wind damage, like trees down, powerlines down, damage to structures, like decks, roofs or awnings.
2. Hail of any size. While pea size hail is not severe, hail of any size in the Southeast US is remarkable and we'd like to know about it.
3. Flooding. This is defined as water standing or water moving over an area typically not covered by water that presents a hazard.
4. Funnel Clouds or Tornadoes. Remember the difference between a funnel cloud and tornado. A funnel cloud is a rotating cloud that is attached to the base of a thunderstorm. If it is rotating, but not attached to the base of the thunderstorm, it is not a funnel cloud. A rotating cloud that is attached to the thunderstorm base that touches the ground is a tornado.

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Be careful when spotting a tornado; a rain shaft (a column of very heavy rain) may appear from a distance to look similar to a tornado, but it does not rotate.

5. Report any lightning injuries or fatalities. We are able to determine the frequency of the lightning, but want to know if there are any injuries or fatalities.

When keeping these things in mind to include in your report, remember that an effective spotter report also includes:

1. Your identity (trained spotter, etc.)
2. Your location (where you observe the damage)
3. State the time the event occurred, if known.
4. Give a detailed description of what occurred.

Following these guidelines is an excellent way to assist the weather service in protecting life and property from severe weather. Remember, never put yourself at risk to collect information to report. A report of damage after the storm has passed is still needed as we can use that information to either verify our warning or alert counties in the path of a storm.

Thank you for being a spotter and sending us important weather information! You provide a great service to us and we enjoy working with you. If you have any questions please feel free to email me at [Kelly.Godsey@noaa.gov](mailto:Kelly.Godsey@noaa.gov) or give me or one of our forecasters a call at 850-942-8833.

I hope to send another letter out by the end of August. If you all have any suggestions about a topic you'd like to hear more about, please let me know.

Thank you again for being part of our spotter network!

Sincerely,

Kelly Godsey  
SKYWARN Program Manager